

James 'Jake' McNiece Obituary

James Elbert "Jake" McNiece, son of Eli Hugh and Rebecca Ring McNiece, was born at Maysville, Oklahoma on May 24, 1919. He was next to the youngest of 10 children with 4 older brothers and 4 older sisters. He died at the home of his son Hugh McNiece in Chatham Illinois on Monday morning January 21, 2013 at the age of 93. He spent his early childhood and elementary school education in Maysville. His family moved to Ponca City, OK in 1931 when Jake was 12. He completed Junior High and was Captain of the Junior High football team for two years under Coach Baker, who later became the coach at Po-Hi and then at Oklahoma A&M (now OSU). By the time Jake completed Jr. High, the nation was in the midst of the depression. Jake's Dad could not find full employment to take care of the family, and Jake dropped out of High School to work to help support his parents and younger sister. When Coach Baker became the Ponca City High School football coach, he encouraged Jake to return to school to play football. Coach Baker informed him they could find employment for Jake or his father. Jake took a position at the Fire Department and worked the night shift while going to school and playing football by day. In Jake's senior year, he was captain of the football team and president of the senior class. He graduated in 1939. During his work with the Fire Department, he learned to use explosives demolishing fire damaged structures. Following high school he worked in road construction and at the Pine Bluff arsenal continuing his experience with explosives. After completing the job at Pine Bluff Arsenal, he enlisted for military service and volunteered for US Army Paratroop duty on September 1, 1942. He was assigned to the 506th Parachute Infantry Regiment, Headquarters Company. Basic training took place at Camp Toccoa, Georgia. With his prior experience using explosives, he was immediately assigned to the demolition saboteur section to train other troops in the use of high tech explosives. The nucleus of the group that became known as "The Filthy 13" began to form at that time. Following completion of basic training they went to jump school at Fort Benning, GA. The 506th was then assigned for further training at Camp Mackall, South Carolina, at which time they were officially attached to the 101st Airborne Division. From there they were involved in the first Tennessee maneuvers in early 1943. The 101st Airborne embarked for England in September, 1943, for further training and to prepare for the invasion of Northern Europe. With Jake as their Sergeant, The Filthy 13, sporting Mohawks and war paint, participated in the invasion of Normandy, France, June 5th, 1944. They jumped behind German Beach fortifications shortly after midnight before the main invasion force hit the beaches the next morning. Jake and others successfully accomplished their assigned mission (thought to be a suicide mission); however, most of the core Filthy 13 were lost in battle or taken prisoner. Following this, he made three more combat jumps, the invasion of Holland, at Bastogne (The Battle of the Bulge), and at Prum Germany. The Holland jump was made famous by the book and movie "A Bridge Too Far." After the Holland jump, Jake volunteered for Pathfinder Duty. He led the pathfinder team that jumped into Bastogne during the Battle of the Bulge to set up the resupply of the trapped 101st Airborne, helping turn the tide of the battle. His 4th jump at Prum Germany (Siegfried Line), was to guide resupply of a section of Patton's tank forces that had been isolated and cut off from Allied supply lines. After Jake's discharge from the military in February, 1946, he travelled the US with his father for

about 6 months. (His mother had died while Jake was overseas.) He settled in California for a time, doing railroad and construction work, and returned to Ponca City, Oklahoma, in 1949. Jake went to work for the US Post Office in Ponca City and settled down for a 28 1/2 year career serving the public. Jake served in local and state offices for the Postal Clerks union. In Ponca City, Jake married his first wife Rosita Vitale, who died after 3 1/2 years of marriage in August, 1952. His second wife, Martha Beam Wonders, moved to Ponca City in September 1952, following the death of her first husband. Jake and Martha began dating the following spring and were married September 4th, 1953. They stayed happily married for 59 1/2 years. They were active members of the Hartford Avenue Church of Christ where Jake was instrumental in beginning a food program and leading a home Bible study group among other areas of service, and later the Tonkawa Church of Christ. Jake loved fishing, hunting and gardening – and friendships and service opportunities that revolved around them. Jake and Martha took several trips to Europe, where Jake was honored for his service in WWII. Jake has been honored over the years for his service to the Country. He was inducted into the Oklahoma Military Hall of Fame, made an Honorary Colonel of the 95th Victory Division. He was awarded an Honorary Masters degree in Military Science, by Cumberland University, Lebanon Tennessee for his participation in the military maneuvers there 1943. In 2012 Jake was awarded the French Legion of Honor, Knight Chevalier medal, the highest honor the French President can give to an enlisted soldier. His story can be read in the book, "The Filthy Thirteen; the true story of the Dirty Dozen" by Richard Killblane and Jake McNiece. Jake is survived by his wife Martha McNiece; his sons Alan Wonders and wife Billie Ruth (Richardson, Texas) and Hugh McNiece and wife Mary Ellen (Chatham, Illinois), his daughter Rebecca Sue Brewer and husband Joel (Katy, Texas), and grandchildren Lucy Wonders Hahn (husband Micah, children Luke, Titus, and Elle), Cara Wonders, Michelle Brewer Withrow (husband Matt, children Mason and Madison), Caleb McNiece (wife Kristi), Silas McNiece, and Hannah McNiece. A memorial service will be held on Saturday, January 26, 2013 at 1:00 pm at Hartford Avenue Church of Christ with Mr. Don Huddleston, officiating. There will be a reception to follow after the service. Visitation will be held at Trout Funeral Home on Thursday, January 24, 2013 from 8:00 am-8:00 pm and Friday, January 25, 2013 from 8:00 am-12:00 pm. In lieu of flowers please consider making a memorial contribution in honor of Jake to a Veteran's Organization, A Food Bank or any other charity.

Arrangements are made under the direction of Trout Funeral Home and Crematory.

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